CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIRST PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 15 June 2000, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Jean Lint (Belgium)

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I declare open the 851st plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

As you know, President Hafez al-Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic passed away last Saturday, after having stood at the helm of his country for 30 years. The passing of this leader, who contributed so much to the stability of his country, is a great loss for the Syrian people, for the Arab world and for the region as a whole. On this sad occasion, I would like to convey, on behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, our sympathies and condolences to the Syrian Government and people. I now invite the Conference to observe a minute of silence in memory of the late President.

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Ambassador Mounir Akram of Pakistan has asked for the floor on this occasion, to speak on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan): Mr. President, the members of the Group of 21 express their heartfelt condolences to the Government and the people of the Syrian Arab Republic on the sad demise of President Hafez al-Assad.

President Assad served his country for three decades. During that period, he worked tirelessly for the betterment of his country and its people and ably led Syria through many difficult and challenging circumstances. Under his sagacious leadership, his country emerged as an important member of the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement and other organizations, creating a place of importance for Syria in the comity of nations. The political acumen and statesmanship of President Hafez al-Assad were acknowledged by the entire international community. His contribution was considered essential for the realization of durable peace in the Middle East.

Mr. President, the members of the Group of 21, of which Syria is also a prominent member, share the grief and sorrow of the Syrian people and wish them fortitude and courage to bear the irreparable loss of President Hafez al-Assad.

Mr. AL-HUSSAMI (Syrian Arab Republic) (translated from Arabic): Mr. President, allow me at the outset to congratulate you on the creative way in which you direct the work of the Conference on Disarmament and on your extremely diligent attempts to open every possible window for us to reach an agreement on a programme of work that would allow the Conference to move towards the discharge of the highly important international mandate vested in us. I should like to express to you and to the members of the Conference our deep gratitude and appreciation for this initiative that you have taken in observing a minute of silence in memory of Syria's late-departed President Hafez al-Assad. We would like to put on record our deep gratitude to you and to Ambassador Mounir Akram, the representative of the Group of 21, for the moving words that you have addressed to us on the occasion of this grievous loss to Syria. The delegation of my country would like to thank you all for your sympathy at this sad time when Syria, the region and the world have lost a statesman of the highest calibre, who devoted

(Mr. Al-Hussami, Syrian Arab Republic)

his life to the development of a modern Syria, the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction from the region and the achievement of a peace based on justice that would respect international law and resolutions and pave the way for security, stability and prosperity in the region as a whole. Thank you Mr. President.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. On my list of speakers for today I have the representative of Japan, Ambassador Noboru, to whom I now give the floor.

Mr. NOBORU (Japan): Mr. President, at the outset, let me congratulate you most warmly on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament at this truly important juncture. I am confident that your able guidance will enable the Conference to overcome recent difficulties and find its way to carrying out the task entrusted to it. I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation as you lead the work of the Conference. Our greetings are also extended to the Secretary-General of the Conference and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, and his experienced deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail.

Since this is the very first time that I take the floor to deliver a statement, I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to express how honoured I feel to be here as the representative of Japan and to work with such distinguished delegates for such an important and fundamental cause.

Mr. President, let me start with our assessment of the outcome of the NPT Review Conference held in New York last month. It is truly remarkable that the States parties to the NPT could reach consensus on a document which covered every aspect of the implementation of the Treaty, despite the overall security environment which was not considered favourable for that Conference. This comprehensive agreement could not have been achieved without the painstaking efforts made by all the States parties to bridge the differences between their positions.

The final document adopted at the Review Conference clearly demonstrated that all the States parties to the NPT are seriously committed to the realization of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The States parties also emphasized that the NPT regime should be further strengthened to achieve this goal. In addition, the process through which agreement was reached proved that differences of views and positions can be bridged by the strong political will to move forward.

Accordingly, the Japanese Government sets high store by the outcome of the Review Conference as a significant achievement, and strongly hopes that this event will be able to contribute to disarmament efforts in other bodies and forums, especially in this Conference.

Mr. President, with regard to the Conference on Disarmament, I would like to highlight, among other issues, two notable agreements on future steps for nuclear disarmament. One is the need to commence, without delay, FMCT negotiations with a view to concluding such

(Mr. Noboru, Japan)

negotiations within five years. The other is the need to establish an appropriate subsidiary body in the Conference on Disarmament with a mandate to deal with nuclear disarmament.

The strong exhortation to the Conference on Disarmament to conduct these two tasks was put forward by the States parties by consensus, representing the overwhelming majority of the international community. For its part, the Conference should heed this global call and should now take a decisive step towards translating this call into reality. In order to achieve this, it is imperative for us immediately to agree on a programme of work, making best use of the momentum created at the Conference in New York.

If not, the world will never understand why the Conference on Disarmament remains complacent in its standstill. It is obvious that we cannot afford to waste any more time on procedural debates.

In this regard, my Government highly appreciates the strenuous efforts being made by you, as our President, to coordinate the views of different groups on the work programme. And I believe your efforts will bear fruit in the near future. Our basic thought on this issue is, first, that the work programme should be based on the proposals introduced in earlier sessions which already enjoy wide support, and second, that certain fine-tuning should be carried out on them in order to reflect recent developments, particularly the outcome of the NPT Review Conference.

Allow me to touch briefly upon three outstanding issues of the work programme.

The first of these is that the FMCT is one of Japan's priorities. As I stated earlier, we highly appreciate the unanimous agreement that FMCT negotiations should start immediately on the basis of the so-called Shannon mandate.

In 1998, the Ad Hoc Committee on the FMCT was established and two meetings were held under the able chairmanship of Ambassador Moher of Canada. That year, several member States of the Conference on Disarmament, including Japan, organized workshops and seminars on the margins of the Conference to stimulate and give impetus to the negotiations. Many diplomats, as well as experts from capitals, participated in serious discussions regarding key elements of the future FMCT. Through these discussions, it became apparent that the FMCT negotiations would be highly intricate, both politically and technically. For this reason too, it is essential that intensive negotiations should commence immediately, if we are to conclude our work within the target of the next five years.

Bearing in mind the time-frame which will be required for the negotiations and entry into force of the FMCT, it is of great significance that, as an interim measure, those States which produce or produced fissile material for nuclear weapons, should declare a moratorium on such production. We welcome the moratoriums already announced by certain States and call on States which have not yet done so to follow suit.

Unfortunately, the FMCT has not been negotiated since the end of the 1998 session. Japan has been striving to elaborate its national position by conducting bilateral consultations with many interested countries.

(Mr. Noboru, Japan)

I will confine myself here to mentioning our basic principles for the FMCT negotiations:

First, the FMCT should be globally applicable;

Second, the FMCT should be non-discriminatory;

Third, the verification measures should be cost-effective;

Fourth, the FMCT should in no way affect the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes; and

Fifth, stock should be dealt with either in parallel with the FMCT negotiations or in the subsequent negotiations.

I expect that I will soon have a more suitable opportunity in an Ad Hoc Committee to elaborate on each of these points.

The second issue that I wish to highlight is that the consensus reached in New York on the necessity to establish a subsidiary body with a mandate to deal with nuclear disarmament is a significant step forward. As we try to translate it into an actual mandate, I sincerely hope that flexibility and a spirit of cooperation will be demonstrated by the members of the Conference on Disarmament, especially by the nuclear-weapon States.

On this very important issue, let me reiterate our Government's long-standing position that advancement of nuclear disarmament requires a combination of unilateral, bilateral and multilateral measures which complement and strengthen one another. Furthermore, progress on and prospects for nuclear disarmament directly or indirectly affect global peace and security. This is the reason for our strong belief that the role of multilateral forums on disarmament should not be underestimated, although we highly appreciate and welcome unilateral or bilateral nuclear disarmament efforts by the nuclear-weapon States.

Judging from the discussions of the procedural aspect of this issue in recent sessions of the Conference on Disarmament, it seems to us that the work of this subsidiary body could best serve its purpose if one starts with an exchange of information and views and explores further prospects for practical steps. Seen in this perspective, we believe that the proposal by the President is well drafted and will lead us to an agreement on its basis.

The third outstanding issue on which we need to agree in the programme of work is prevention of an arms race in outer space. Japan does not recognize that there is an arms race in outer space today or that there is an imminent danger of such a situation arising. On the other hand, it is true that the existing international legal instruments were established many many years ago. When we consider the advancement of technology, we cannot deny that there may be a need to reflect on possible future measures to prevent an arms race in outer space.

(Mr. Noboru, Japan)

As you may recall, the Ad Hoc Committee on PAROS was established and re-established every year from 1985 to 1994. Various interesting ideas and proposals were put forward in the deliberations. Yet, it must be pointed out that a convergence of views did not emerge on any of the specific proposals. Therefore, it is apparent that the time is not ripe for negotiations on this issue. It is most appropriate, as well as logical, to start with deliberations with a view to generating one or more possible future measures for our in-depth consideration. This idea is well reflected in the President's proposal on PAROS and my delegation is ready to consider the mandate on that basis.

I am a relative newcomer to this forum and may now reveal my ignorance about the relative intricate workings in the back rooms of the Council Chamber when I make so bold as to share the following impression of mine. Whenever I come to this conference room, I feel as if we are merely standing around and speaking to one another by the doorway of a conference room, instead of sitting down to discuss and negotiate substantive issues seriously. It is natural that we have differences of views and positions, and we should address and explain them through open discussions. If, however, we continue to make use of the divergence of views as an excuse for not being able to start substantive discussions, the Conference on Disarmament will remain paralysed and its credibility will be further damaged.

It is often said that the Conference on Disarmament is the best club in town and I am most happy to join it. Yet, the club was clearly not created for its members' self-indulgence. Let us get down to our real business and meet the expectations of the international community. For that purpose, let us all give our utmost support and cooperation to our President as he endeavours to find consensus for us on the programme of work.

Mr. President, you may rest assured of my delegation's full confidence and cooperation.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the Ambassador of Japan for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. Do any other delegations wish to take the floor at this stage? That does not seem to be the case.

Before adjourning this meeting, I would like to inform you that, given the urgent need that we all feel for the Conference to start its substantive work, as we have just been reminded by our Japanese colleague, I am continuing intensive consultations in the hope of reaching consensus on the Conference's programme of work. To that end, during yesterday's presidential consultations, I requested the group coordinators to draw their respective members' attention to a proposal containing the principal elements of a programme of work. It is my hope that all delegations will study it in a spirit of compromise and that they will let me know their reactions to it through their coordinators during the presidential consultations to be held next Wednesday.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 22 June 2000, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.